

## Networking

Networking is a systematic process of establishing and maintaining relationships with people who have the resources or capability to help you further your personal or professional goals.

## Functions of a Network

An effective network offers these benefits:

- Opens doors to new opportunities inside and outside of your work place.
- Provides support when dealing with positive and negative changes in your personal and professional life.
- Creates a resource pool or skill bank that may help you to round out weak areas or to enhance your effectiveness in new skills or work efforts.
- Provides referrals for new career opportunities.

## Types of Networks

### **FORMAL:**

A professional group designed to promote networking among its members.

### **INFORMAL:**

Personal relationships that you have developed over time and can rely on for support.

### **INTERNAL:**

Professional relationships and contacts developed in the workplace.

### **EXTERNAL:**

Professional relationships and contacts developed outside the workplace.

## Preparing Yourself to Network

**Assess your skills** - What do you have to offer to individuals, groups or organizations? What are your skills, knowledge, and abilities?

**Believe in yourself** - How confident are you in your technical competence? If you were to write a 60 second commercial about yourself what would you list as your strongest assets?

**Have clear goals** - What are your goals? Are you able to say clearly how a network could support you in reaching your personal or professional goal?

**Know your style and personality** - How comfortable are you in meeting new people? Are you able to talk about your strengths and skills in a confident manner? What environments make you most comfortable meeting and talking with new people? Do you prefer to communicate with people in person, on the telephone or in writing? Do you tend to meet people and not follow up with them? What would help you to keep in contact with each other?

## How to Build a Network

**List your personal and professional goals** - Write down your goals. Practice saying them aloud so that you are comfortable talking about them with others.

**List key contacts** - Make a list of a.) people who can help introduce you to people who could assist you in meeting your personal or professional goals, b.) people who are doing the type of work you want to do, and c.) people who could possibly offer you work in your professional area.

**Identify professional organizations** - Find out what groups or organizations are already formed that are linked to your professional goals. Find out when meetings occur and check it out for interest. Consider how the goals of the organization or the membership could support you and help you to grow.

**Demonstrate your expertise** - Show people what you are capable of doing. Be willing to volunteer for projects that allow you to demonstrate your knowledge, experience or skill. Demonstrate how you can contribute.

**Keep business cards and rolodex current** - Keep cards in an easily accessible place and check periodically for accuracy of information.

**Set goals to meet and contact new people** - Set monthly goals for yourself to meet new people who can expand your network.

## How to Maintain Your Network

**Keep in contact often** - Let your network know that you are there. Contract with individuals to contact with them monthly, bi-monthly, etc.

**Give as well as receive** - Find out how you can help the members of your network. Networking is a two-way street.

**Follow up when activity takes place** - Be sure to keep your network in the loop when events of interest take place. Also make sure that you let people know that you are aware of actions they may have taken on your behalf.

**Show appreciation** - Send thank you notes or show your appreciation in other ways when your network does something to help you reach your goals.

## Networking Tips

In a presentation to DOS employees, Leslie Shields, author of Work, Sister, Work, made these points about networking.

Is it really about who you know? Does it make a big difference? The overwhelming response is YES. Here are some strategies to make networking beneficial to you.

1. **Set "networking goals."** Who do you want to add to your network? Why? How will you contact these individuals? Plan on meeting your contacts regularly for breakfast, lunch, dinner or after-work drinks. When you approach a busy individual and ask them to have lunch with you, have an agenda in mind. Be specific about what you want. If they ask what you need to talk about, you do not want to say, "Well, uh, I don't know. John Smith just thought we should get to know each other." This is not practicing networking, you are practicing antagonizing!
2. **Create a system for keeping track of your network connections.** Keep notes on information gathered and the people who give it. Make notes about small talk. For example, "How was your trip to Jamaica?" "What were the results of the mentoring program you developed?" "How does it feel being elected the president of the PTA?" This makes people feel remembered and engaged when they talk to you.
3. **Develop a diverse set of contacts.** It takes, let us say, 50 pairs of eyes and ears to find a new job or career, open doors to the right people, or locate a business opportunity. As a result, the more diverse your network is, the more beneficial it can be.
4. **Be generous with your time and information.** Networking is a system of IOUs. If people have been helpful to you, be helpful to them and others. Recommend and exchange resources. Pass along book reviews, articles, reports and program materials. Introduce your contacts to each other and let others know you are interested in meeting new people.
5. **Practice mingling and the art of small talk.** A good start is to read either: How to Work a Room by Susan Roane or Great Connections by

- Anne Barber and Lynn Waymon. When attending social functions, don't limit your interaction to one or two people. Don't hang on the wall or stay in one spot. Read newspapers and magazines. Arm yourself with information - facts, opinions, or quotes - that will spark an exchange.
6. **Observe networking etiquette.** Respect confidentiality. Don't take information you have received and pass it on recklessly. Before giving the name and number of a contact to another person, always ask permission of the third party. Respect other people's time. If you have asked for 30 minutes, take responsibility and end it at 30 minutes. When connecting by phone, always ask "Is this a good time to talk?" Thank everyone who gives you a lead with a telephone call or a short note.
  7. **Remember the rule of No's.** The Rule of No's states that if we ask for what we want, we will get turned down sometimes. Don't take it personally if someone turns down your request for an information meeting or cancels an appointment with you. It is important to be persistent, but don't be a pest. If you don't get your phone calls returned after three times, or if someone has canceled a meeting more than once, take them off your list.

Think of networking as an investment. Connect today so that you can gain tomorrow. Make networking a part of your life!